

IPIB Monthly Column

November 2, 2021

Margaret Johnson, Executive Director

Question: Does a person who wants to speak at a meeting of a governmental body have the legal right to do so?

Answer: No. A governmental body sets the agenda for its meetings and decides whether it will permit public comment. Iowa Code section 21.7 states that a governmental body can make and enforce “reasonable rules for the conduct of its meetings to assure those meetings are orderly, and free from interference or interruption by spectators.”

Reasonable rules may include not allowing comments on any agenda items, setting a time limit on comments, designating a specific agenda item for public comment, or not allowing spontaneous reactions or outbursts during a meeting.

While the open meetings act provides no mandate that a governmental body must provide meeting time to any citizen with something to say, many set aside time on the agenda for a “public forum” or an “open forum.” Even when allowing discussion of a controversial item on its agenda, the governmental body understandably does not have to provide time to each person at the meeting or may limit the time allotted.

Citizens are allowed to use cameras or recording devices during an open session at any meeting of a governmental body.

Did You Know that the Iowa Public Information Board staff is available to assist you with questions or problems involving open meetings and public records in Iowa? During the month of October 2021, 50 contacts were made with the Iowa Public Information Board office.

TYPE	October 2021
Formal complaints	7
Advisory opinions	0
Declaratory orders	0
Informal complaints	3
Informal requests	35
Miscellaneous	5
TOTAL:	50

board members

Joan Corbin • E. J. Giovannetti • Barry Lindahl • Keith Luchtel • Monica McHugh
Frederick Morain • Julie Pottorff • Suzan Stewart • Stan Thompson

Who can contact the IPiB and how long does it take? Any person can contact the IPiB for assistance by telephone (515-725-1781), by email, or on the IPiB website. So far in 2021, 606 identifiable people have contacted the IPiB. Of these, 319 were private citizens, 218 were government officials or employees, and 69 were members of the media. In 2021, 70% of the incoming contacts were resolved the first day, 13% were resolved in one to five days, and 17% were resolved in six or more days. Opinions, rulings, FAQs, reports, and training documents are available on the IPiB website – www.ipib.iowa.gov.